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AUTHOR Hickman, Janet
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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study of children's response to literature at a range of developmental levels and in a variety of natural classroom contexts involved comprehensive classroom observations of 90 children aged five to eleven years representing a range of abilities. Data were collected during a four-month period on daily log sheets, then later classified into (1) listening behaviors, (2) contact with books, (3) acting on the impulse to share, (4) oral responses, (5) actions and drama, (6) making things, and (7) writing. Examples of students' responses were compared according to age level differences, and teacher strategies of manipulating contextual settings were categorized. Among the connections identified from the data were that the direct accessibility of a book seemed to be of primary importance in children's willingness to express any response to it at all, and that the most powerful feature of classroom contexts was their manipulation by teachers. (AEA)

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EXTENDING THE DIMENSIONS OF RESEARCH IN RESPONSE TO LITERATURE: RESPONSE IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

Janet Hickman

In recent years research has provided increasingly precise descriptions of students' response to literature - their interests and understandings, and the way these are tied to various stages of human development. From the point of view of those who work with children of elementary school age, however, this body of research seems to reflect an incomplete set of assumptions about what constitutes response and what its important aspects are. A brief look at some significant studies will suggest that while these have dealt with important questions, they have left others unasked and unanswered.

What the Research Fails To Tell Us

Squire's (1964) study of adolescents reading four short stories rests on the basic premise that response is a process that goes on as readers apprehend material. His method, which attempts to get at the process in progress by asking for reader introspection at designated stopping points within the text, has been used in a somewhat different form by Benton (1979) with ten- and eleven-year-olds. Theirs is a valuable

perspective, but it does focus exclusively on response as a first-time-through affair. The initial process of response, though basic, is not the whole of it. Teachers of young children know that their students welcome, sometimes demand, repetition of a text, and that they continue to "respond" to it long after first exposure. Response seems to include a temporal dimension that goes beyond first meetings with text, a dimension that is tied to repetition and sequence. However, except for the case study method advocated by Petrosky (1976) and others, and technical investigations of story structure and recall (e.g. Bower, 1976), research designs are seldom equipped to consider successive responses.

Another important premise of the research in response is that since literature is language, the most appropriate approach to response is verbal. Certainly literary criticism, the most commonly identified form of response, is a special use of language. Concern with students' ability to make critical comments led to Richards' (1929) classic study analyzing written responses and isolating factors seen as barriers to "correct" literary judgments. Statements were also solicited and categorized as a part of Squire's (1964) method. The system of categories developed by Purves and Rippere (1968) for looking at written responses has served many other studies, both as an analytical tool and as a frame for more elaborated description. It is true that what students can say about literature is crucial, even central, to the study of response.

But those who work with young children know that language tells only part of the story of what they are feeling and thinking. Not only do young children seem to have intentions and meanings before fluency, but they also characteristically use modes of expression other than language, revealing themselves through gesture and movement, for instance, or in their painting or other art work. As Huck (1979) suggests, it makes sense to look for children's perceptions of literature in many of their products and activities, not just those that are strictly verbal. The reliance on verbal measures and critical statements which seems generally appropriate for studying the response of young adults is less satisfactory when the subjects are children, since it ignores this important nonverbal aspect of their communication.

The most comprehensive work to date on children's response to literature has been Applebee's (1978). His exploration of the child's concept of story provides a synthesis of language and aesthetic theory with cognitive psychology to support a developmental model of response stages from early childhood through late adolescence. Much of the data on which he draws is verbal, having been collected in interviews (Applebee, 1973). By also using a repertory grid instrument (Applebee, 1976) for eliciting their choices and judgments, he was able to provide a particularly detailed analysis of what children perceived to be important about stories, and the interrelationships of various factors in their construal of them.

This technique allows for considerable openness and flexibility in drawing out children's own answers rather than suggesting preconceived ones. Even so, the data must be generated in a structured context, a measurement situation rather than a spontaneous one. Applebee helps us see how children of various ages organize their thinking about stories and how it is expressed when the task of responding is set before them by an adult. What happens, however, when response is not directly solicited? When children deal with stories on their own, or when they interact with each other, what forms of response do they use? Do they seem to organize their thinking in the same ways? Do the developmental stages identified in research function as constraints in non-research settings? Does response remain constant when the immediate social context changes?

These are questions of practical interest to teachers. However, like the concerns mentioned earlier, they cannot be answered, or even approached, without extending our research to include a wider range of evidence gathered in naturalistic settings. Researchers in other aspects of language - in sociolinguistics (Cazden, 1972), in writing (Graves, 1973), and in reading (Carini, 1975; Griffin, 1977) - have worked in real classrooms, using a variety of ethnographic methods. It seems reasonable to assume that a similar approach ought to be productive for investigating children's response to literature.

Using Ethnographic Methods To Study Response

The study (1979) reported here sent the investigator as a participant observer into an elementary school to study children's response to literature as it occurred, considering both a range of developmental levels and a variety of natural classroom contexts. As in all ethnographic research, the choice of setting was critical. Here it depended finally on three factors: first, the evidence of active attention to and involvement with literature throughout the school, so that there would in fact be something to observe; second, the likelihood of establishing the necessary rapport with staff members; and last, the structure of the school. In this case, both the curriculum and the architectural design could be described as open, a circumstance allowing maximum freedom and flexibility for the observer.

The particular classrooms to be involved were chosen to represent the full range of the school, K - 5, and by identifying teachers with a strong commitment to incorporate literature in their reading and language arts program. Three multi-age classes designated as grades K-1, 2-3, and 4-5 were used, with a total of 90 children aged five to eleven years. The small-city community from which the school population was drawn was predominantly white, lower middle and middle income working class. Many residents had rural or Appalachian backgrounds. Although no statistical information except for birth dates was collected, the children appeared by all casual measures to

represent a typical range of abilities.

The study was carried out over a four month period at the beginning of the school year, starting on the first day and ending just before Christmas break. Because the children's experiences with literature were not limited to scheduled times, the observation period was comprehensive, from morning lunch count to afternoon clean-up, all day, every day, with few exceptions. Each of the three classes was the focus of concentrated attention for twenty consecutive school days, although both of the other groups were also observed, less intensively, during the same period.

The primary means of data collection here was observation, with descriptive notes and anecdotal records kept in a daily log. Since no model was available for observing classroom response on such a scale, the notes were wide-ranging, including items and events that were clearly related to children's response as well as those that reflected experience with literature in a more peripheral way. Books and materials available and used by children were noted. Comments by children and by teachers were often summarized, but reported verbatim when possible. Their activities were described and sometimes diagrammed or sketched to clarify the precise context of who was with whom, and when.

The multiple approach to evidence, or triangulation, which is standard practice in ethnographic studies, was adapted to this topic in several ways. A cassette recorder was used to collect complete versions of some discussions and individual

interviews on audio tape. Photographs and facsimile copies of children's art work and writing served to document the relationship of these products to literature and to provide for later cross-references to their description in the notes. The investigator's personal perceptions were checked against others in nonstructured interviews of teachers, the library aide, and other staff members, who were asked to comment about children's preferences, understandings, difficulties, and activities. Some children were themselves considered key informants and interviewed as such.

Finally, in order to guarantee some response data that could be compared directly across age and grade levels, one book was chosen to be introduced to a few children at each level and used as the basis for a more systematic collection process. The Magical Drawings of Moony B. Finch, by David McPhail, a picture book fantasy with an element of irony, was read to or with a total of 28 children, most often in groups of two or three. These children were then given the task of talking freely about the book on tape, either alone or in a small group, with no adult present. Later each child was interviewed individually, again on tape, using a predetermined set of questions.

Making Sense of the Evidence

Casting the nets wide means catching a lot of odd fish, as well as a fair amount of junk. The trick is in sorting

and choosing, deciding what to keep and what to do with it. One corollary of not imposing limits on the evidence is accepting the size of the task of interpretation. Any scheme of organization for the data that emerges as interpretation progresses may in itself furnish new perspective on the topic.

Response as Event

One of the quickly obvious requirements of dealing with hundreds of pages of notes on literature-related classroom happenings was to code and classify those happenings according to the type of activity involved. Thus response, an essentially private phenomenon, was tracked in terms of the public events through which it was expressed. The children's activities were categorized as follows:

1) Listening behaviors
   - body stances
   - laughter and applause
   - exclamations, joining in refrains

2) Contact with books
   - browsing
   - showing intent attention
   - keeping books at hand

3) Acting on the impulse to share
   - reading together
   - sharing discoveries

4) Oral responses
   - retelling, storytelling
   - discussion statements
   - free comments

5) Actions and drama
   - echoing the action
   - demonstrating meaning
   - dramatic play
   - child-initiated drama
   - teacher-initiated drama

6) Making things
   - pictures and related art work
   - three-dimensional art and construction
   - miscellaneous products - games, displays, collections, cookery, etc.

7) Writing
   - restating and summarizing
   - writing about literature
   - using literary models deliberately
   - using literary models and sources unaware

If a category system for activities or modes of response had been developed before the collection of data, it is likely that many of the items on the preceding list would not have been included. The category of contact with books might well have been excluded on the grounds of being too obvious, or simply a prerequisite rather than a means of response. Sharing as a category would not have come to mind in the sense that it is used here. But the task of sorting all the evidence forces attention to that which might otherwise be overlooked. Although children were encouraged and at times even directed to read with a partner, many shared reading experiences were the children's own choice and seemed to reflect a common positive reaction to the selection. Much of the spontaneous sharing of "discoveries," both child to child and child to adult, began with cues for gaining another's attention: "Look at this!" or "Listen to this!" or nonverbal equivalents like poking and pointing and beckoning. These encounters sometimes developed to include formulated response statements, but their genesis

seemed related not so much to the desire to talk about the work as to re-experience it and to have one's own response affirmed by another person. The frequency of such events suggests that there may be an important aspect of response that is predictive, not in the sense of looking ahead to what will happen in the story, but in anticipating the reaction of another reader or listener.

Range and Sequence of Events

Other advantages accrue from seeing response in terms of the total range of events through which it is expressed. The occurrence of nonverbal modes was largely predictable, fitting both the characteristics of the age levels and the expectations of the teachers. But the juxtaposition and sequence of verbal and nonverbal behaviors were more interesting. The numerical order of the reported categories represents, in rough overview, the order in which modes of expressing response to a single selection most often occurred. Even though teachers prompted and sometimes required an activity, children almost always were allowed to choose among alternatives and to pick their own time, so that the order of events remained partly spontaneous. Although one child would not be likely to participate in all the suggested actions, the complete list would represent a comfortable, if hypothetical, sequence. Written responses most often occurred at the end of a child's period of attention to a particular book or story, perhaps because the teachers insisted that writing be produced eventually, perhaps because interim

modes of response made writing easier at that point. Oral response, though given the middle position in the reported list, actually occurred in the free comment and informal discussion forms, in juxtaposition with other events. The use of the nonverbal modes, particularly actions and drama and the art or construction activities classified as making things, seemed to influence some children's development of the verbal mode. That is, they were better able to formulate statements about stories after they had dramatized the action or painted a picture of some of the characters, as if one sort of activity mediated the other.

Although most of the categories on the list of response events are labeled in terms of individual action, in fact, most of the observations involved children together, in pairs or small groups or as a class. When various groupings of children would return to one story over a period of time, the resulting qualitative shift in verbal response seemed related less to the precise sequence of activities than to their variety and repetition, and the interaction of the respondents. The following summary excerpt from the observational log will illustrate both the range of response events over time and the way in which familiarity breeds comment. The account begins with Mrs. Christopher's K-1 class and eventually includes the 2-3 group (Mrs. Patrick). Most of these children were already familiar with Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are before the school year began, and had since heard it read aloud.

October 4. Mel and Warren are making a mural. Their man-in-the-moon face is scowling, with sun rays around its head.

"Is it a daytime picture or a nighttime one?" asks Mrs. H.

Mel hesitates, but Warren looks at the book lying nearby and says, "Night." He explains that it's a story about Max and the place where the wild things are.

October 5. Warren is holding up the Wild Things mural and chasing people with it. It isn't finished yet, he says.

October 6. Warren and Mel's mural is on display, with writing: [The spelling has been conventionalized.]

> Warren and Mel by the picture of Where the Wild Things Are. One night Max rode in his boat. In the night Max saw a island. He saw monsters. The king one said. I am the strongest! he said. And Max said I'am the strongest! he said.

October 9. Warren is one of the children who stay after school to talk with visitors from the University about books and how they are used at Parkland. He and a boy from another class read aloud Where the Wild Things Are. After the reading, Warren wants to ask the visitors questions about the book, teacher-fashion.

November 28. Mrs. Christopher reads Where the Wild Things Are aloud to the group in preparation for their part in the school Christmas program. She announces they will make a play based on the book. Ben says, "I wanta be Max!" Warren says, "We've read this before." Jack stares at the wordless middle pages. "Why ain't you readin' them?" he asks. Warren explains, "Because there's no words. They're just yellin'." Jack says, "Read it again, Mrs. Christopher."

Later, in the carpeted area with Mrs. Patrick's class, the unified arts teacher leads a "supposing" discussion, gathering ideas for a visit by Max to the Wild Things' island on Christmas Eve, appropriate gifts, and a party scene. Jared thinks that Max could "bring like cannonballs and decorate the monsters." Ben suggests that Max could say, "Let the wild Christmas rumpus begin!"

Still later, Mrs. Christopher's class uses the carpeted area for their regularly scheduled movement class. First they gather on the floor, studying the illustrations of Max and the wild things in the book. Then each finds a personal space and experiments with being monster-like, using teeth, eyes, hands, legs.

December 5. Mrs. Patrick has scheduled the animated film, Where the Wild Things Are, for the music room. The K-1 group is invited. Mrs. Christopher says that most of her children have seen this film before.

When the music starts, Warren says, "It sounds like a jungle."

Carl, Jared, Mindy, Danny Joe, Mark and Terrence all act out the wild things' motions with their hands and arms.

At the end Mindy says, "It was neat." Terrence stands up to demonstrate which of the monster movements he liked best.

"I like when they're getting charged up," says Warren.

December 6. There is a practice for the Wild Things Christmas production. Ben suggests "when we're finished someone should come out and say 'the end'."

December 11. The K-1 group practice the song parody that they will sing as Wild Things, and talk about the costumes they will wear - stuffed pantyhose for tails, and cardboard ears, with fierce make-up on their faces.

December 13. The whole school participates in a full-scale rehearsal of the program. All the kindergarteners leave at lunch time, and Mrs. Christopher begins to read Where the Wild Things Are to the first graders, even the title page and copyright notice. Halfway through the text, she is called away briefly, and she gives the book to Danny Joe to finish. To his irritation, most of the others chime in on most of the lines. After the last sentence, "And it was still hot," Carl speaks up.

"That's not true," he says.

Mrs. Christopher has slipped back to the edge of the circle. "Why?" she asks.

Carl says, "Because when I'm out playin' and I come in, my supper's cold."

Mrs. Christopher asks why Max's supper was still hot.

Gretchen answers, "Because probably he got it only about half an hour after he came back."

"Back from where?" asks the teacher.

"From where the Wild Things are," says Gretchen.

Sara offers another idea. "Maybe he went to sleep and had a dream."

Mark says, "It's not true that a forest grows...."

The teacher points out the place in the text where Max tells his mother he will eat her up. Do they know any other place that says "I'll eat you up"?

Mary knows that this is something the Wild Things tell Max, and so do several others.

....

Most ways of looking at response attempt to find out what students are doing or saying or thinking about a book at a given point in time. Judging by the dynamic nature of the patterns observed among these children, it seems important to know more about the sequential and social dimensions of response as well.

Age-Related Patterns

The first level of data analysis, categorizing expressions of response in terms of events, provided a foundation for comparing the age-grade groups. While all modes of response were represented in all three classes, some events were more characteristic of one level than another. The K-1 group, age five and six, were most inclined to use their bodies to respond, echoing the action of a story as it was read to them or demonstrating its meaning when questioned by going through appropriate motions. In a discussion of the Emberleys' Drummer Hoff, for instance, some of the first grade boys spontaneously attempted to arrange themselves as parts of a cannon to explain how the one in the book was built. Dramatic play was also

characteristic of this group; a big bad wolf appeared and reappeared in the play corner after the class had heard the story of "The Three Little Pigs."

In the middle group, grades 2-3, roughly age seven and eight, the prevalent types of response events reflected the children's preoccupation with the task of becoming independent readers. Their concern with accomplishing and demonstrating reading skill was evident in the amount of time spent reading together and sharing discoveries, and the frequency with which they commented about conventions of print or expressed preferences for books they could read by themselves. Otherwise this group seemed to represent a transitional stage; that is, different children at different times were like the K-1 group or the 4-5 group, rather than separately identifiable as members of the 2-3 group.

The children in the 4-5 class, most of whom were age nine or ten, did not engage in dramatic play as such, and were generally less reliant on actions and more confident with words. While children at all levels browsed and sought out favorite books, older ones showed a narrowing of preference in books for personal reading, with strong feelings for and against particular selections. More intent attention to books was noted at this level as well. However, perhaps the most striking things about the 4-5 group's response behaviors were their own awareness of the available range of modes and their increasing ability to manipulate them.

Some of the age-group differences in types of response events can be illustrated by comparing characteristic responses to Shel Silverstein's Where the Sidewalk Ends, a collection of humorous verse that was popular with all three classes.

K-1. Two boys ask to hear "The Acrobats" read aloud. At the end where there is a mention of sneezing and an implied reference to falling, they tumble onto the carpet, giggling, demonstrating the meaning of the verse.

2-3. The book is frequently passed from hand to hand during work time as children read favorites to one another. It often serves as a reference point for various conventions of print. One girl points to "Lazy Jane" as an example of a poem that "repeats lots of words"; a boy suggests, "Let's read some poetry - let's look 'em up in the index."

4-5. Several girls who are composing a skit draw on the Silverstein material, knowingly incorporating it into another literary frame. They pick up the title and meter of "Ickle Me, Pickle Me, Tickle Me Too," making from it a chant to end their own production.

Another important aspect of the comparison between younger and older children in this study had less to do with ways of responding than with qualitative differences within a single form. Oral responses in particular reflected children's level of thinking and language development, although similar indicators were observed in other types of response events.

Younger children's responses were centered on parts rather than wholes, while older children demonstrated the ability to deal with a story in more generalized terms. K-1 children frequently commented about details in pictures or texts without relating that bit to a wider perspective. "Itemizing" seems to be a fair term for this strategy, which was evident in their

picture making as well as in their comments. Early in the study many kindergarteners painted scenes that were collections of objects and characters from a story; in contrast, fourth and fifth graders usually painted scenes that showed the relationship of settings and characters. Although older children sometimes used itemizing, they employed it as a deliberate strategy; when summarizing stories they almost always did a better job of incorporating details efficiently than did the younger ones.

Older children's ability to abstract a theme statement from a story indicated greater facility with language as well as a broader perspective on the material. K-1 children who were questioned about The Magical Drawings of Moony B. Finch could talk about theme in terms of the story itself, by rearranging the action of the text: "He shouldn't go out and do sorts of stuff like that because it might happen again." Ten-year-olds drew on broader experience as well as the power of language to generalize: "You can't do everything for everybody."

In terms of story conventions, younger children demonstrated some familiarity while older children frequently manipulated the conventions in a way that indicated mastery. K-1 children, for instance, recognized and used conventionalized beginnings and endings like "lived happily ever after," although they were often puzzled by unfamiliar variations. In a discussion of the Norwegian "Snip, snap, snout,/My tale's

told out" found in the Asbjornsen version of The Three Billy Goats Gruff, a first grader related this to the bobbing of an animal's tail. Of particular interest also was the younger children's use of literary prototypes such as "the witch," "the wolf,", or "the little girl" in their storytelling, writing, and dramatic play. Even when books and stories named a character and clearly delineated the character's peculiarities, the K-1 children seemed more at home with generic names and types. The 4-5 group was more likely to offer comment about characterization, reflecting a sense of a character as a particular creation, like or unlike a real person. All in all, the older children showed their wider experience with stories, and this was nowhere more evident than in their conscious manipulation of models for composing. One 10-year-old confided that she had read so many fairy tales that it was easy to write one. The creation of parodies and other variations also indicated older children's conscious perception of the important features of story types.

Along another track, younger children were often pre-occupied with establising the "truth" of a story - could it possibly have happened? - while older children made fewer comments about such concerns. In The Magical Drawings of Moony B. Finch, Moony possess the ability of drawing pictures that spring to life when touched; he eventually uses his gift to draw a dragon that chases away a greedy crowd that threatens him. When K-1 children were asked for free response to this

book, one of their chief concerns was whether or not the events of the story were possible. Left alone or in small groups with the book and a tape recorder, they puzzled over it and attempted to explain it in terms compatible with their understanding of the world and of other stories (cf. Applebee's 1978 discussion of the elaborative choice).

> Child alone. I think it's not really true. Sort of like a folk tale, I think. [Deep breath.] I just don't know what - how - he does it. It's like magic.
>
> Child alone. That picture, it looks like the man's magic and he did it. But I don't really understand these pictures....
>
> Four children talking over the book together.
> C. It's not really true.
> S. I know. It's just a story they made up.
> B. [Indicating an illustration.] This old man set down 'n made it up.
> W. ...and you see rather than makin' it come to life he made it come to a mural, with a dragon.

When questioned later about the events of the story, all the children agreed that pictures could not come to life, offering the rules of evidence as proof. A kindergartener picked up his own drawing and shook it, demonstrating its stability; a first grader argued that "...if things slipped off papers, then no one would be able to show a picture to somebody." As to the reality of the dragon pictured in the book, children were not so sure; it needed more explaining. One girl offered the idea that "It's people in there, inside of the dragon...makin' fire come out of his mouth." Another said that it was a paper dragon. Even the first grader who

was able to explain that "this is a book and books ain't true" felt it necessary to justify a comment about the dragon's not being real by studying the illustration and saying that "dragons don't have them tails like that." At the 2-3 level, the problematical events in the book were accounted for by simple explanations: it "couldn't really happen," but "it's fantasy," and "that's how it is in the story." Children in the 4-5 group had little trouble in phrasing statements that recognized the world of the book as a sphere of its own.

In terms of the expressed responses it might seem that concern for the possibility of a story was purely a feature of a developmental stage. Certainly the older children's increased facility with language let them deal with the question more easily. It was also true, however, that many of the stories which drew the older children's attention were proportionately easier and more predictable, for them, than the younger children's materials. When confronted with texts that were unfamiliar, unpredictable, or otherwise challenging, older children too spent some time in sorting out its possible and impossible aspects. For instance, as the teacher of the 4-5 group read aloud Mollie Hunter's A Stranger Came Ashore, children considered alternative identities for the "stranger" and argued about the literal circumstances of the shipwreck which brings him into the story. This might indicate that the distinction between fantasy and reality is a first-level response

to new types of material, regardless of developmental stage.

Although age level patterns were easy to find within the data, it was much more difficult to decide what part of the differences might be ascribed to development and what to learning. Response strategies seemed to be learned behaviors, with evident effects of cumulative experience and direct teaching. Children's familiarity with many stories, their references to past projects and activities, and their occasional deliberate imitation of teacher-talk all spoke for the influence of schooling.

While older children functioned more effectively as critics than younger ones, particularly as they considered the same book, the younger children sometimes demonstrated learned strategies that would be beyond their reach according to a strictly developmental model. Occasionally K-1 children labeled a book according to genre, or commented directly about an author's or artist's technique, as their teacher frequently did when reading aloud to them.

Although children at all levels offered comments about the likenesses of similar stories, explicit references to similes and metaphor were notably rare on the children's part, in spite of the fact that even the K-1 teacher called attention to such uses of language. Analogy and metaphorical interpretation of story were even less in evidence, with the best example occurring in reference to the more concrete imagery of a picture book:

4-5. The teacher reads Dawn by Uri Shulevitz to the group, explaining that although she thinks it is already familiar to them, the illustrations and the language are so good that they will enjoy it again. Afterwards they begin to discuss the colors and shapes of the pictures.

Someone says that the first picture looks like an egg. The teacher asks if the artist used that shape on purpose.

One girl in the group registers excitement. "Oh!" she says. "It's like a chick hatching. Night turns into day - the chicken comes out of an egg - you know."

The Manipulable Context

Throughout the sifting of evidence for this study, it was obvious that most of the observable response events were tied to the setting in which they occurred. Various expressions of response were either permitted by or facilitated by or generated by the climate of the school and the weather of the classroom. Thus the description of these contextual settings, particularly of those elements which were teacher-controlled, became a major concern.

One of the characteristics of the total school environment was a high regard for children's books and other literature. Wide reading of trade books was seen as the chief means of reading instruction although children were expected to move at their own pace through a more structured text-oriented program as well. Writing and oral language were also encouraged and valued, with considerable freedom for the practice of both. Since individual projects and small group work involving a choice of activities were the rule, a teacher's read-aloud

time might be the day's one activity that involved the entire class. Teachers and children seemed generally to share a positive perception of literature: books were central to the school experience, and they were meant to be enjoyed.

It was against this background of general expectations that the three teachers observed in this study organized their own classroom programs. All three were similar in age and in prior experience and had been trained in the same University program; like most of the staff, they also made deliberate attempts to coordinate and talk over their efforts. Although individual personality was clearly a part of each teacher's classroom approach, the patterns of activities that they arranged were so similar that the three have been treated as one.

Their strategies for controlling the classroom learning context for literature fell into these general categories:

1) Providing books by selecting titles for the class and putting these within the children's reach.

2) Presenting literature by reading aloud, and by introducing books to individuals and groups.

3) Discussing books with children.

4) Providing time, materials, and suggestions for book-related activities ("extensions").

5) Arranging for the formal sharing and display of children's extensions.

The interrelationship of these strategies and children's responses proved to be too complex for full analysis under the terms of the study, but even superficial analysis revealed

some obvious and thought-provoking connections. For instance, the direct accessibility of a book seemed to be of primary importance in children's willingness to express any response to it at all. They sometimes made brief references to remembered stories, but writing and artwork and other reflective responses called for having the book nearby, where it could be handled, leafed through, read again, or simply carried about. Perhaps most important, the books at hand were the books that generated discussion; for many children, touching a book was almost prerequisite to talking about it.

Among these books at hand, the ones that seemed to generate the most talk and the greatest variety of response events were those that the teacher had introduced or read to the group. The fact that a book had claimed the teacher's attention gave it in a sense a special sanction which apparently encouraged some children to pursue it. Moreover, books shared aloud were more accessible in the cognitive sense, as children could react to the story itself without dealing with whatever problems the act of reading might bring.

A notable influence on response in the qualitative sense was the teacher's selection of books around a theme, or ones that in some way lent themselves to comparison. Many of the presentation and discussion strategies also served to help children make connections. Where these strategies were less evident, students made fewer comments about story similarity.

One of the functions of teacher-led discussion was as a primary tool for teaching about literature. Conventional terminology for the formulation of critical statements appeared in some children's responses after words were supplied to fit meaning established as the class talked about particular books, for example "folk tale" in the K-1 group, "refrain" in 2-3, and "transformation" in 4-5.

The various kinds of book-related activities or extensions encouraged for children at all levels guaranteed quantity in response events, though the qualitative influence was less clear. While many activities appeared on the surface to be distinctly non-literary, a close look at the products showed that children's perceptions of a story were often revealed there, represented implicitly as in a puppet play or a game board, rather than explicitly as in critical commentary. One of the functions of the variety of activities that went on and of their subsequent sharing and display was the opportunity for repetition and reflection, with the concomitant opportunity for the refinement of personal response.

All throughout this last sorting of the observational data, where categories of teacher-created settings were matched with response events, it was clear that the most powerful feature of classroom contexts was their manipulability. By making changes in the immediate environment - in terms of what books were offered and in what combinations, what materials were available for extension activities and who was encouraged

to pursue them, how much discussion took place and at what point - teachers were able to influence the types of response events that occurred and to have some measure of control over their qualitative aspects.

Extending the dimensions of research in response to literature to admit a wider range of evidence collected in naturalistic settings means that the research may be more cumbersome, but also more productive. Borrowing the long-term, holistic approach of the ethnographer allows for attention to concerns which have been largely ignored because they are mostly inaccessible by other means: the development of responses over time; the occurrence of a variety of modes of response, nonverbal as well as verbal; age-related differences revealed in natural and spontaneous contexts. If children's response to literature can be described as at least partly dependent on setting and context, as it is here, and if the context is indeed manipulable, as it was here, then response needs to be further investigated on those terms.

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